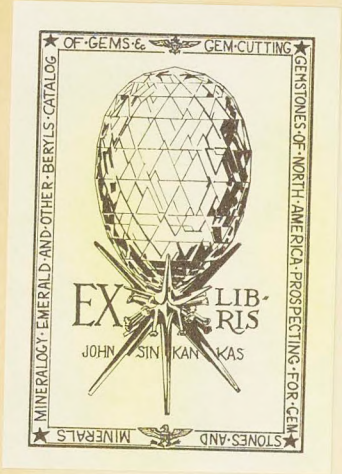

John Sinkankas Cdr USN
April 1955

Jade Amulets

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Historical notes with coloured illustrations and interpretations of the most characteristic forms.

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JADE is the ideal stone for jewelry, for, in addition to being extremely hard, its fibrous structure renders it the toughest of all the hard stones. The Chinese long ago discovered this, and have always regarded it as the most precious gift the Immortals have given to man. In Jade work, as in porcelain, to them belongs all the honour of having perfected the art in both, and for this reason we have obtained from them the following information on Jade, which we think will be useful to those who take an interest in this most fascinating of minerals.

HISTORICAL. Occasionally when excavating in China, oblong pieces of Jade of dark brown colour are found. These were probably worn as jewels, and are the oldest in existence, for who worked them, there are no records to say. Chinese tradition states that when the Immortals formed the earth they rained down these pieces to give it virtue. As they are said to bring long life to the wearer they are worn as amulets by elderly people.

Worked Jade is found in the old tombs of the Chou dynasty, thus being about 3,000 years old. This Jade is a russet brown (page 6) and is believed to have once been white, but has been turned to this colour partially by the decomposition of the corpse with which it was buried, and also by the ingredients of the soil.

Experiments have been made to prove this in Peking, and it was found that white Jade when buried with a dead dog was, after 10 years, slightly discoloured.

THE pieces of Jade were interred with the corpse in the Chou dynasty for symbolic reasons, as we place wreaths and crosses of flowers on the coffins of our dead. The mouth was also closed with pieces of Jade, which were generally carved in the form of a Cicada.

The Chinese often refer to this Jade as "han Jade," meaning "mouth Jade." This has led to confusion as many Europeans, with little or no knowledge of the language, have concluded that the Jade was worked in the Han dynasty. As the symbolism of the Chou Jade appeals only to the learned, and its colour not being attractive, it is worn almost entirely by the savants and the aristocracy. Good decorative pieces, such as hair ornaments and bracelets, were made in the Sung dynasty, but after, the work declined until the reign of the Emperor Kein-lung. As the name of the Emperor Kang-hsi is always associated with the best porcelain so Kein-lung's influence is responsible for the most beautiful work ever executed in Jade.

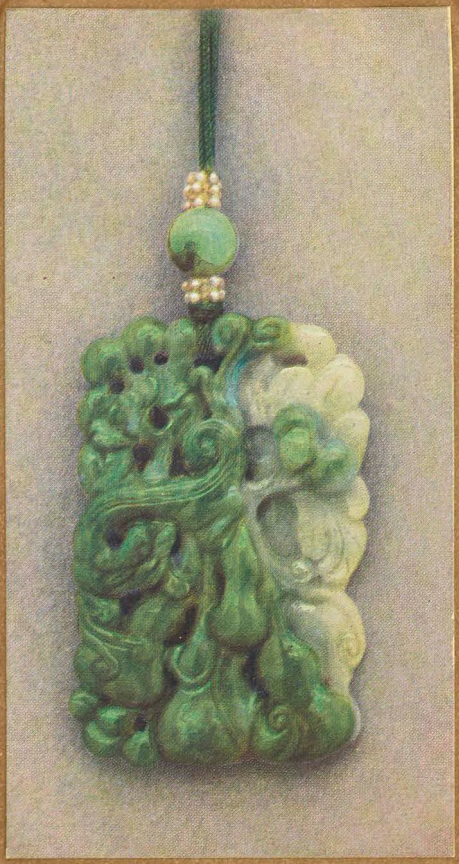
THE Emperor himself seems to have had a preference for the pure white variety, probably because it showed off the delicate low relief carving better than the coloured Jade. Many short verses he composed were carved on small Jade tablets about one inch by two inches, and were given away by him as marks of favour (page 7). On one side the poem was carved in low relief while the reverse was carved to illustrate it. By the Emperor's example this became quite a general practice, and many of these beautiful tablets can be obtained. Any signed by Tsze-Kong, the renowned artist in Jade, are probably the Emperor's own poems, as this great craftsman was employed by him. One of these tablets has been copied and enlarged by a Chinese artist to form a cover for this book. On the back of the book is the Emperor's poem with Tsze-Kong's signature in the left hand bottom corner, while the front shows his design illustrating the poem.

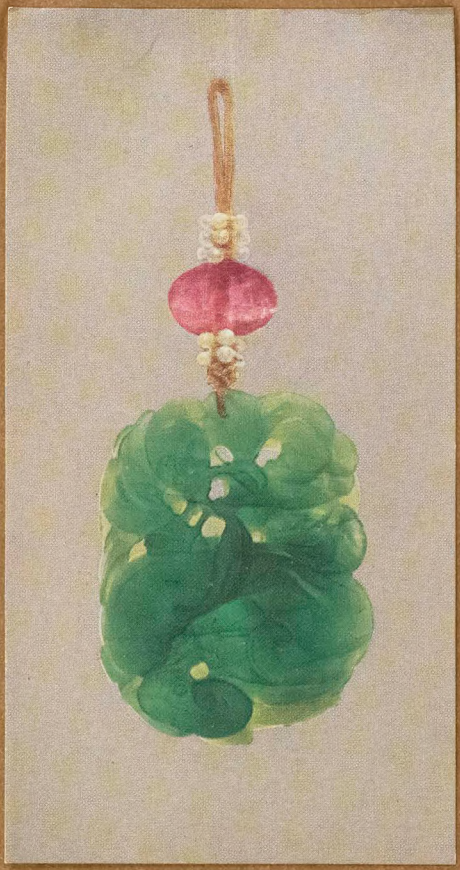
THE following is a literal translation :—

"Magnificent and brilliant as the autumnal chrysanthemums, beautiful and luxuriant as the vernal pines is this Goddess of the Lu-lo, like as the drifting clouds eclipsing the moon, and the rustling winds whirling the snow are her graceful movements and winning manners."

Decorative Jade temperance badges were also worn at this time to denote that the wearer drank no wine or ate no meat.

JADE is divided into two varieties, which differ slightly in their chemical composition, and are known as Jadeite (silicate of sodium and aluminium) and nephrite (silicate of calcium and magnesium). The green of nephrite is usually a grey green or celadon colour. The beautiful bright apple green as well as the lavender colour are only found in Jadeite. The clear pink stone prized next to Jade by the Chinese is sometimes known by Europeans as "pink Jade." It is not Jade, being a pink variety of tourmaline called rubellite.





COLOUR. Jade is found in different tints of white, green, yellow, red, brown, grey, blue, lavender, and black. Green is the most valuable and should be clear and brilliant; in fact, if a piece of Jade and an emerald were both cut "en cabachon" and placed side by side they should both look alike (page 12). Such Jade is extremely valuable and only found in small pieces, but the nearer it approaches to this standard the greater is its value. Black is generally regarded as a defect. Lavender is rare and prized when occurring with green and white. The Jade worked in Pekin is a bright green, with a dense white, and has little brilliancy. That worked in Canton is clearer and of a better quality. As a rule, the designs of the Pekinese craftsmen are curious and interesting, while the designs of the Cantonese are often direct transcripts from nature.

AMULETS. The working of Jade into amulets calls forth unlimited opportunities for the display of artistic craftsmanship, for an amulet is of considerable value if worked from a piece of Jade of two or three different colours, which are made use of in the design; thus an amulet may represent green lotus leaves on which sits a yellow frog, while the piece is crowned with lotus flowers of a beautiful lavender colour shading off into white. Such an amulet would be known as a "four colour piece." Amulets were worn until a few years ago, and were suspended with a fine silk cord, enriched with seed pearls, from a button on the shoulder. Usually they were given as presents, and with a symbol loving people like the Chinese were of course used to convey pleasant wishes. The following list explains the meaning of some of the usual forms:—

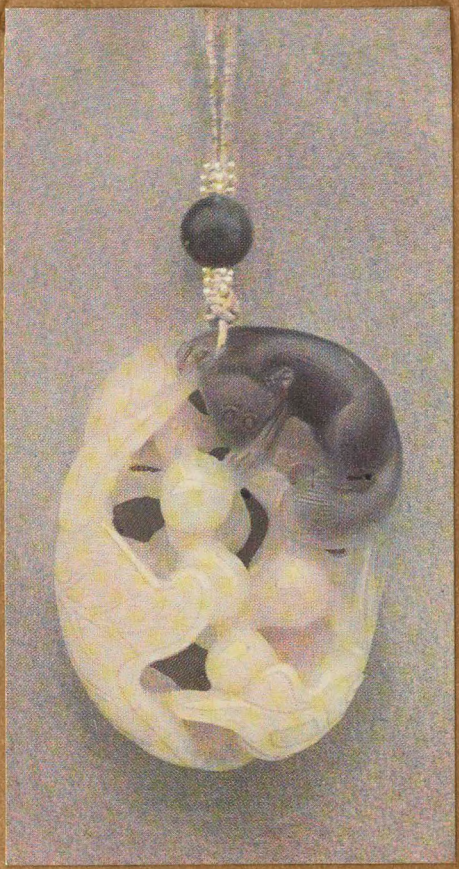
BAMBOO. This being a brilliant green all the year, means continual prosperity.

BAT. By a pun on the Chinese word, this may be understood to mean happiness.

BOTTLE GOURD. As the immortal Tieh - Kuai - Si keeps the elixir which cures all complaints in a bottle gourd, the gift of one expresses a wish that the receiver should be free from illness.

CAT. An animal said to bring wealth. Two cats when placed head to tail represent the mystic symbol "Ying and Yang." If of two different colours, especially lucky, as the amulet represents the union of opposites, bringing great prosperity and good luck.

CITRON. Owing to the shape, this fruit is sometimes called "Buddha's hand." As a gift, it conveys the wish that the Immortals shall bless the receiver.



CHAN. Frog with three legs. Once a beautiful woman, so transformed for having stolen the elixir of life. The ornament is to remind women that they must be punished if they interfere in matters not belonging to them. A favourite form of toy for Chinese children.

CRANE. By a pun on the word, it may mean "Long Life."

DEER. By a pun on the word, it may mean "honoured success."

DISC WITH PELLETS IN RELIEF. An amulet to keep away evil spirits. An entrance door is often covered with large headed bronze nails for this purpose.

DRAGON (page 16). Until the end of the Ming dynasty the dragon was represented somewhat like a salamander, and was the symbol of military authority. When the Manchus seized the throne the dragon became the Imperial emblem and was represented with horns and a ferocious appearance.

DUCK. Wishes for a happy marriage. Conjugal fidelity.

FÊNG HUANG BIRD OR PHOENIX. A mythical bird somewhat like a pheasant and only seen at the birth of a distinguished person. It is the guardian of virtuous maidens. As a wedding emblem it represents the bride, and the dragon the bridegroom.

FUNGUS. Emblem of long life.

GREAT BEAR CONSTELLATION. As the spirit of Life is supposed to dwell in this constellation, it sometimes appears on amulets. The spirit of death dwells in the Southern Cross.

HORSE BEE AND MONKEY. By a pun on the Chinese words, it may be understood as "quickly become a Duke," thus expressing a wish that the receiver should quickly obtain the honours which he deserves.

JU-I. A sceptre in shape, being an elongated pentagon about 12 inches long and 3 inches wide. The symbol of civic authority.

KHING. A piece of metal shaped like a carpenter's square and used as a bell in the temples. By a pun of the word, it may mean "luck."

KY-LIN. The Chinese unicorn, with a body like a water buffalo, head like a dragon and tail like a Pekinese dog. A benevolent animal, having the power to bring sons to any family who desires them.

MAGPIE. In China this is called "the Bird of Joy."

NATAL ANIMALS. The Chinese do not record years in centuries but in "cycles" or periods of sixty years, which are again divided into periods of twelve years, each year being represented by an animal. In correct order these animals are as follows:

NO. 1, Rat; 2, Ox; 3, Tiger; 4, Rabbit; 5, Dragon; 6, Snake; 7, Horse; 8, Sheep; 9, Monkey; 10, Fowl; 11, Dog; 12, Pig. A Chinaman born in the sheep year will prefer that any great events which will affect him personally should, if possible, take place in a sheep year. It also is an influence in the selection of a wife, for he would run considerable risk if he married a lady born in the tiger year. These animals are worn as amulets, but they are only lucky if worn by a person born in the year to which they refer. The year 1919 is the year of the sheep, and counting backwards from this you will be able to discover your lucky animal. It is interesting to know that the Chinese is the longest unbroken chronological period on record, dating from 2637 B.C., and that the year 1919 is the 56th year of the 76th cycle.

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A Chinaman born in the above year will prefer that any great events which will affect him personally should if possible take place in a lucky year. It also is an influence in the selection of a wife, for he would run considerable risk if he married a lady born in the tiger year. These animals are seven in number, but they are only lucky if were a person born in the year to which they refer. The year 1919 is the year of the sheep, and counting backwards from this you will be able to discover your lucky animal. It is interesting to know that the Chinese is the longest surviving chronological period on record, dating from 2637 B.C., so that the year 1919 is the 60th year of the 76th cycle.

PARROT. An emblem of happiness.

PEACHES. The fruit on the tree of life is a peach, which has led to it being looked upon as an emblem of longevity.

PEONY. This flower is the emblem of Fa Na Fo Tsze, and is said to bring wealth.

POMEGRANATE. This fruit contains beautiful seeds, and means "May you have many children."

PRUNUS BLOSSOM. This is the first of all flowers, and is the most welcomed, as it heralds the coming of Spring. A present for a lady.

SQUIRREL and FRUIT (page 17). Referred to by Chinese as "the little foxes which steal the grapes," which might be taken as a quotation from the Songs of Solomon. The Songs of Solomon, however, were probably taken from the Amorites, who in turn took them from the Babylonians. This design was first introduced into China about 2,000 to 3,000 years ago when bronze mirrors were imported from Persia, which were often decorated with this design.

THUNDER CLOUD. Emblem of benevolence.

TWO FISH. Wishes for a happy marriage.

BEADS. The official string of beads of a Chinese mandarin originated from the Buddhists' rosary, and for this reason it contains 108 beads, representing the 108 saints. The beads are divided by 3 large beads and attached to the string are three smaller strings each of 10 beads, and also a centre plaque and pendant. The beads are worn with the plaque and pendant hanging down the back. It was introduced into China by the Manchus. To break the string is considered the most unlucky thing that could happen to the owner. Small strings consisting of about 75 graduated beads, often converted by Europeans into necklaces, are intended by the Chinese to be used as head ornaments for women.

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Jade Amulets

紫陽新菊義之美
松髓芳髓節之高操
之蔽用祝風之法
風之迎香

子圖